



SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY
2013-2014

LAWYER IN THE LIBRARY

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2013-2014 Solano County Grand Jury

I. INTRODUCTION

Lawyer in the Library (LITL) is a service available to citizens at some libraries in Solano County in need of free legal assistance provided by volunteer attorneys who are active members of the California State Bar Association (CSBA). The John F. Kennedy (JFK) Library in Vallejo initiated the first LITL service in 1996.

II. METHODOLOGY

- Interviewed library personnel at the following libraries:
 - Benicia Public Library
 - Dixon Public Library
 - Fairfield Civic Center Library
 - Vacaville Cultural Center Public Library
 - John F. Kennedy Library in Vallejo
- Interviewed:
 - Solano County Bar Association (SCBA) presidents, past and present
 - Citizens assisted by the LITL services
 - Lawyers active in the LITL service
- Reviewed:
 - San Francisco Examiner article *Vallejo's Lawyers @ Your Library, Program: still giving free legal advice*, February 15, 2011
 - Leaflet *Legal Assistance: Free or Low-Cost Services*
 - Various handout materials and forms
- Observed LITL process in action

III. STATEMENT OF FACTS

Any person can go to a local library that has a LITL service for free consultation and legal guidance. It is not necessary to be a member of the library or have a library card to receive this service. Each library have their own meeting dates, times, and possible restrictions to the legal matters with which they will assist. The attorneys will take the time to listen to the concerns and explain the various options to resolve the patron's legal questions. It is important to understand that the attorney is not your lawyer and has no client/attorney relationship. The patron information is kept confidential. The lawyer is providing this service pro bono (without compensation).

Benefits reported by interviewed patrons assisted by the attorneys include:

- Relief of stress they feel due to their legal problems
- Feeling their life is transformed and they can once again relax and worry less
- Provides excellent direction to resolve their legal issues

Benefit reported by attorneys include:

- Satisfaction from providing a needed community service

It is important to understand the attorneys donate their time and services.

The difficulties with getting attorneys to volunteer include:

- A large number of the attorneys work outside of Solano County. Many find it difficult for them to commit to the service given the challenges of commuting and their business hours that may extend into the early evening.
- There are no law schools in Solano County from which to recruit.
- Lawyers do not receive credit from the CSBA with respect to pro bono work.
- No credit for Minimum Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) is given by the CSBA. MCLE refers to the approved continuing legal education required of California attorneys.
- CSBA does not recognize the LITL service.

Statistics for 2012-13 reveal JFK Library in Vallejo assisted 788 patrons. Vacaville Cultural Center Public Library assisted 118 patrons. Benicia assisted approximately 168 patrons.

The details regarding the libraries currently providing the LITL service are:

- Benicia Public Library provides the service on the 1st Thursday of every month. Sign up is at 5:00 p.m. in the Art and Gallery hallway. Service is provided from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The service is based on a first come first served basis. There are 14 slots available with two attorneys and each consultation is limited to 20 minutes. Consultations are for civil matters only.
- Vacaville Cultural Center Public Library provides their service titled *Attorney's @ Your Library* on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month. Sign up is at 4:00 p.m. and is limited to seven patrons. Consultations are from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The attorney will spend up to 20 minutes assisting each patron. The Grand Jury was advised that an additional attorney may be added this year. Generally, only one attorney is available.
- JFK Library in Vallejo provides 24 interview slots to patrons each session. Patrons are limited to 4 visits a year. The time allotted per patron normally is not to exceed 20 minutes. Sign up is on a first come first served basis starting at 5:00 p.m. with lines forming at 4:30 p.m. Service is provided from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month. Currently, two or three attorneys are available for each session.

Currently, the LITL service is not provided in the following libraries:

- Dixon Public Library does not provide the LITL service as they have no space available for consultation and privacy. They currently refer people to Vacaville Cultural Center Public Library or the Solano County Bar Association. Transportation is a problem for some people so they do not utilize the service in Vacaville. There would also be a need for a Spanish speaking lawyer, as their community has a large Hispanic population. At the time of the Grand Jury interview the library was awaiting the appointment of a new Director. Library staff intends to recommend implementation of the LITL service to the new Director. The library staff stated the LITL service would be of great value to the citizens of the Dixon community.
- Fairfield libraries have considered the LITL service in the past and have been unable to implement it. Assurance was given by library staff that discussions will continue for possible implementation. Initial starting of the service is the most time consuming factor. Minimal costs for paper and copy machine expenses for flyers promoting the service would be absorbed by the library. There will be no additional cost to the library in regards to personnel as the staff is already servicing the community.

The Solano County Bar Association is aware of the LITL service, but does not actively promote it. The SCBA stated that a proposal needs to be presented to their members and its Board of Directors. The SCBA does not feel they have the power to require the members to participate. The SCBA thinks it is admirable that some attorneys take the time to volunteer for the service. The majority of attorneys seem to have a problem accommodating it into their schedules. The LITL service does not qualify as educational training and no credit is given by the California State Bar Association (CSBA).

IV. SUMMARY

Solano County libraries are very important to our communities. In addition to the extensive research patrons can conduct through computers, books and periodicals, patrons at some Solano County libraries now have the ability to consult with an attorney regarding legal issues for free. The service delivered, as shown through interviews, observations and research is very beneficial to people's lives and provides a direction to proceed. Lawyers that provide their time and service have reported feeling proud of what they do and understand its positive impact on a patron's life.

The LITL service is not available in every library in Solano County.

V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1 – The 2013-14 Solano County Grand Jury found there is no Lawyer in the Library service in the City of Fairfield, where the County Seat is located.

Recommendation 1 - The 2013-14 Solano County Grand Jury recommends the Fairfield Civic Center Library implement Lawyer in the Library service.

Finding 2 – The 2013-14 Solano County Grand Jury found there is no Lawyer in the Library service in the City of Dixon.

Recommendation 2– The 2013-14 Solano County Grand Jury recommends the implementation of the Lawyer in the Library service in the Dixon Public Library.

Finding 3 - The 2013-14 Solano County Grand Jury found the Solano County Bar Association does not actively promote the Lawyer in the Library service.

Recommendation 3 - The 2013-14 Solano County Grand Jury recommends that the Solano County library staff coordinates a proposal to be presented to the Solano County Bar Association supporting the Lawyer in the Library service in Solano County.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Director, Solano County Library – Finding 1 and 3
Director, Dixon Public Library - Finding 2

COURTESY COPIES

Clerk of the Board, Solano County Board of Supervisors

Benicia Public Library
150 East L. St,
Benicia, CA 94510

Dixon Public Library
230 North First St.
Dixon, CA 95620

Fairfield Civic Center Library
1150 Kentucky St
Fairfield, CA 94533

Vacaville Public Library – Cultural Center
1020 Ulatis Dr.
Vacaville, CA 95687

John F. Kennedy Library
505 Santa Clara St
Vallejo, CA 94590

Solano County Bar Association
639 Kentucky Street
Fairfield, CA 94533